



# CenterREP



PUBLIC RELATIONS  
& MARKETING

CENTER REPERTORY COMPANY PRESENTS  
CULTURE CLASH AND BASKETBALL BRILLIANCE IN RIVETING PLAY

## THE GREAT LEAP

March 16 – April 7, 2024 (opening night: March 19)  
LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS, WALNUT CREEK

WALNUT CREEK, CA (13 February 2024) — **Center Repertory Company** will be slam dunkin’ it in style when it presents *The Great Leap* by San Francisco native and award-winning playwright **Lauren Yee** (*Cambodian Rock Band*, *King of the Yees*). This high-stakes work follows a University of San Francisco college basketball team that travels to Beijing in 1989 for a well-publicized exhibition game. For coaches and players, the match offers a chance to claim personal victories on and off the court. Tensions escalate right up to the final buzzer, as a pivotal historical moment collides with the action in the arena. Fueled by dynamic and rapid-fire dialogue, this sharp-witted dramatic comedy—partially set on the basketball courts of San Francisco’s Chinatown—explores the cultural and political risks of raising one’s voice and standing one’s ground. After helming last season’s *In the Heights*, celebrated regional theatre director **Nicholas C. Avila** returns to Center REP to coach this riveting roundball play to a power finish. *The Great Leap* will perform **March 16 – April 7, 2024**, at the Lesher Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek. For tickets (\$42-\$70) and more information, the public may visit [LesherArtsCenter.org](http://LesherArtsCenter.org) or call the box office at **925-943-7469** (open Wed-Sun, 12:00pm-6:00pm).

**Center REP** offers Pay What You Can tickets (suggested price of \$25) for the March 16-17 performances of *The Great Leap*, increasing access to theatre and inviting audiences to see the show at whatever price they can afford. ASL interpretation for deaf and hard of hearing patrons is offered at the 2:30pm performance on Sunday, April 6, 2024.

Seen at leading regional theatres across the country, *The Great Leap* was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. *BroadwayWorld* deemed *The Great Leap* “a beautiful play with vibrant characters and rich history crackling with fresh dialog” and *New York Magazine* lauded it as “an exhilarating, deeply satisfying piece of work.”

“I’m so pleased to welcome the incredibly talented and prolific Lauren Yee into our growing family of playwrights at Center REP,” says **Matt M. Morrow**, Center REP’s Artistic Director. “Her story of family and lineage is intensely resonant, inventive, and relevant. I look forward to bringing this powerful play to life on our stage with this amazing group of artists.”

Director Avila has assembled a talented bench of players to bring this gripping story to the stage. **Edward Chen** (he/him) makes his Center REP debut as Wen Chang, Beijing University’s men’s basketball coach. Chen has performed with Boston Court Pasadena, East West Players, South Coast Repertory, Cygnet Theatre, and Capital Stage Company.

Seen in Center REP’s *Art*, *Don’t Dress For Dinner*, *Ella*, *The 39 Steps*, and *The Underpants*, **Cassidy Brown** (he/him) returns as Saul, the coach of University of San Francisco’s men’s basketball team. Brown has also appeared onstage at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Marin Theatre Company, Aurora Theatre Company, San Francisco Playhouse, San Jose Stage Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Pacific Repertory Theatre, Capital Stage Company, and San Francisco Shakespeare Festival.

**James Aaron Oh** (he/him) makes his Center REP debut as Manford, a scrappy, young Chinese American basketball player. Oh has been seen at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Shotgun Players, New Conservatory Theatre Center, San Jose Stage Company, Quantum Dragon Theatre, and Oklahoma City Repertory Theater.

**Nicole Tung** (she/her) makes her Center REP debut as Connie, Manford’s cousin and a UC Berkeley grad student. Tung has performed with San Francisco Playhouse, Aurora Theatre Company, Woodminster Summer Musicals, American Musical Theatre of San Jose, and in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley’s New Works Festival.

*The Great Leap* features scenic design by **Yi-Chien Lee**, costume design by **Maggie Whitaker**, lighting design by **Spenser Matubang**, sound design by **Lyle Barrere**, and props design by **Alyssa Tryon**. **Kathleen J. Parsons** is stage manager with **Joe Coe** as assistant stage manager.

**Lauren Yee** (playwright) is a playwright, screenwriter, and TV writer. Her plays include *Cambodian Rock Band*, *King of the Yees*, *The Great Leap*, *The Song of Summer*, *The Hatmaker's Wife*, and *in a word*. Her awards include the ATCA/Steinberg Award, the Horton Foote Prize, Doris Duke Artist Award, and the Kesselring Prize, and she was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and the Edward M. Kennedy Prize Her plays were the #1 and #2 plays on the 2017 Kilroys List. Lauren is a Residency 5 playwright at Signature Theatre, New Dramatists member (class of 2025), and a Ma-Yi Writers' Lab member. Yee's current commissions include work with Arena Stage, Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Portland Center Stage, Second Stage, South Coast Repertory. She is a writer for Apple TV+'s "Pachinko," Netflix's "Soundtrack," and a soon-to-be announced upcoming FX limited series. She is executive producing the adaptation of Anthony Veasna So's *Afterparties* for television. She is currently developing new work for Apple TV+ and Netflix.

**Nicholas C. Avila** (Director) returns to Center REP after helming last season's *In the Heights*. Avila has directed and developed plays at theatres including Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Chautauqua Theatre Company, Denver Center Theatre Company, La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, The Chance Theater, Playwrights Foundation, and Son of Semele Ensemble.

### **About Center Repertory Company**

Led by Artistic Director **Matt M. Morrow**, **Center REP** is the resident professional theatre company of the Leshner Center for the Arts. Its season consists of six productions—a variety of classic and contemporary musicals, dramas, and comedies, presented with artistic excellence and high professional standards. Center REP's mission is to celebrate the power of the human imagination by producing emotionally engaging, intellectually involving, and visually astonishing live theatre, and through Outreach and Education programs, to enrich and advance the cultural life of the communities it serves. As a producing theatre, its presentations are conceived and developed at the Leshner Center. Whether the production is a Bay Area premiere or a Shakespearean classic, each is devised to be a one-of-a-kind, artistic creation offering a unique theatre experience for audiences.

## FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

**WHAT:** **Center Repertory Company** will be slam dunkin' it in style when it presents *The Great Leap* by San Francisco native and award-winning playwright **Lauren Yee** (*Cambodian Rock Band, King of the Yees*). This high-stakes work follows a University of San Francisco college basketball team that travels to Beijing in 1989 for a well-publicized exhibition game. For coaches and players, the match offers a chance to claim personal victories on and off the court. Tensions escalate right up to the final buzzer, as a pivotal historical moment collides with the action in the arena. Fueled by dynamic and rapid-fire dialogue, this sharp-witted dramatic comedy—partially set on the basketball courts of San Francisco's Chinatown—explores the cultural and political risks of raising one's voice and standing one's ground. After helming last season's *In the Heights*, celebrated regional theatre director **Nicholas C. Avila** returns to Center REP to coach this riveting roundball play to a power finish.

**WHEN:** Previews: Saturday, March 16 – Sunday, March 17, 2024  
*Opening: Tuesday, March 19, 2024*  
Closing: Sunday, April 7, 2024

ASL interpreted performance: 2:30pm Saturday, April 6, 2024

**SHOWS:** Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays: 7:30pm  
Saturdays: 2:30pm & 7:30pm  
Sundays: 2:30pm

**WHERE:** Leshar Center for the Arts (1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek)

**TICKETS:** For tickets (\$42-\$70) or more information, the public may visit **lesherartscenter.org** or call the box office at (925) 943-7469 (*open Wed-Sun, 12:00pm-6:00pm*).

*“Pay What You Can” tickets (suggested price of \$25) are available for performances on March 16-17, 2024.*

**-30-**

**PRESS:** Contact Lauren Goldfarb, Carla Befera & Co.  
[lauren@cb-pr.com](mailto:lauren@cb-pr.com)

**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available: <https://cbpr.co/press/thegreatleap/>